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## **MIT Research and Effective Pair Trawling**

Research by the MIT Sea Grant Center for Fisheries Engineering Research indicates that midwater pair trawling may be the most effective, resource-sparing, and marine-mammal-friendly approach to landing bigeye, yellowfin and albacore tuna. Data from the 2-year study, which was authorized by the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS), is being examined by the agency as it considers making pair trawling an approved method for catching tuna.

Since 1993, NMFS has permitted only long-lining and gill netting for commercial tuna fishermen on the east coast. While little data exists regarding the exact bycatch (the catch of untargeted species) with these techniques, both involve levels that concern fishermen and environmentalists alike.

In the MIT Sea Grant study, a small group of fishermen spent 2 seasons midwater pair trawling for tuna in the northwest Atlantic. With this method, 2 vessels work together, with each boat pulling on one side of the net. Accompanied by NMFS observers, the fishermen documented the performance of their fishing gear for each haul and recorded all catches.

The extensive documentation of the fishery, in which nearly 95% of the fishing trips were made with NMFS observers, offers the agency the opportunity for utilizing scientific data in its decision-making. "This experimental fishery represents a new way of getting things done," says Cliff Goudey, director of the MIT Sea Grant Center for Fisheries Engineering Research and coordinator for the experiment. "By allowing the experiment and providing observers, NMFS was able to get the data it needed to make an informed decision, with minimal expense," notes Goudey. The study also represents an example of research being supported by the industry it will affect — in this case, the fishermen.

With the tuna-fishing season starting in mid-August, NMFS is expected to make its decision regarding the approval of the fishery very soon.